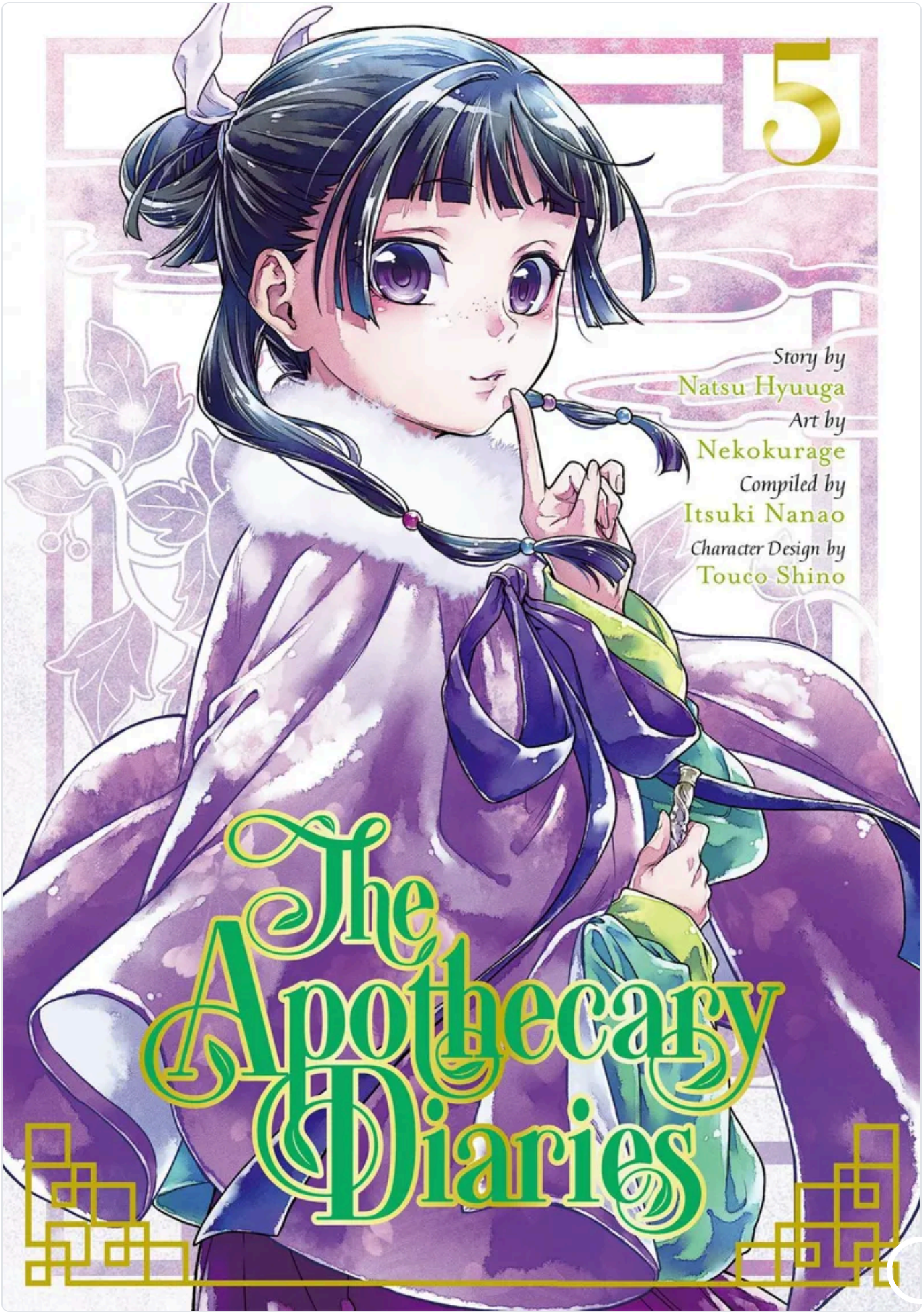
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Story by
Natsu Hyuuga
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The Apothecary Diaries

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The Apothecary Diaries

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THE EAST WING LIES BEYOND HERE AND IS OCCUPIED BY MILITARY PERSONNEL.
PLEASE AVOID THE AREA AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE.
I WAS SURE I'D BE GOING BACK TO THE INNER COURT.
ALL RIGHT.
THE PALACE I'M BEING GUIDED AROUND IS VAST.
THERE ARE SO MANY BUILDINGS, I COULDN'T COUNT THEM ALL ON MY FINGERS AND TOES IF I TRIED.
YOU'LL BE WORKING HERE IN THE OUTER COURT NOW, XIAOMAO.
RETURNING ISN'T SO EASY A MATTER ONCE YOU'VE ALREADY BEEN MADE TO QUIT.
DEEP WITHIN THE PALACE GROUNDS LIES THE INNER COURT, WHERE THE IMPERIAL FAMILY RESIDES.
THE OUTER COURT, MEANWHILE, IS HOME TO VARIOUS GOVERNMENT OFFICES AND IS WHERE A MULTITUDE OF OFFICIALS GO TO WORK.

MENACE
ゞゞゞ...
HMM?
PERHAPS IT'S DOWN TO PA BRINGING IN ALL THOSE PLANTS, BUT THE INNER COURT IS FAR SUPERIOR TO THIS PLACE...
...WHEN IT COMES TO INGREDI-ENTS FOR MEDICINE.
BLEH!
BETTER WATCH MY BACK.
HERE TO CHECK OUT THE NEW GIRL, HUH?
GLAAAARE
4

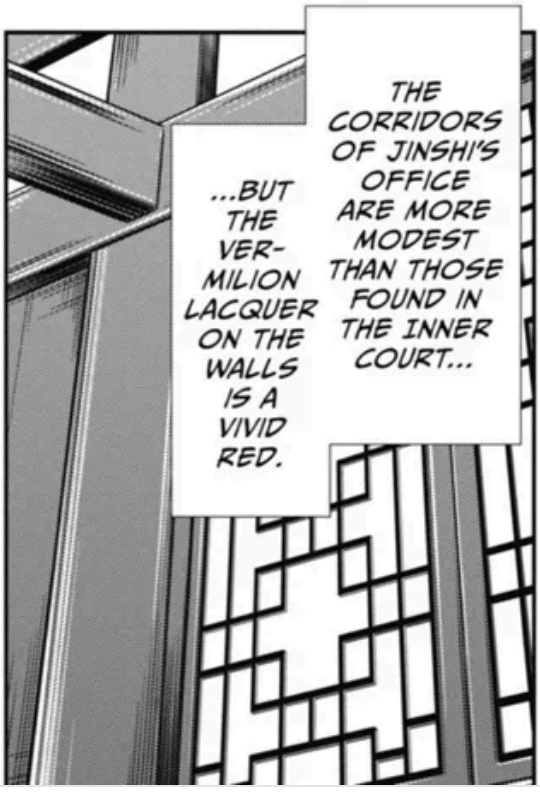
Chapter 22 Working in the Outer Court

YES, WELL... BEGGING A THOUSAND PARDONS, MY GOOD SIR.
HOW COULD YOU FAIL?
IT WAS A TEST, TO BE SURE, BUT WE'RE HARDLY TALKING THE HIGHEST OF THE IMPERIAL CIVIL SERVICE EXAMS HERE.
I FAILED THE TEST.
.....
NOW WHAT AM I TO DO WITH YOU?
...BUT IT WASN'T TO BE.
I THINK JINSHI WANTED ME IN SOME POST OR OTHER...
SHIIINE
ペカー
I DID TRY TO READ THE BOOK HE GAVE ME.
GASP
I TRIED, BUT WHENEVER I DID, THE SUN WOULD BE UP BEFORE I KNEW IT.
BUT I DISLIKE STUDY-ING.
AS SOMEONE RAISED IN THE PLEASURE DISTRICT, MY MINIMAL EDUCATION INCLUDED READING, WRITING, AND POETRY.

AND SO...
I'M NOT EVEN SURE WHY I WAS MADE TO TAKE THAT TEST IN THE FIRST PLACE.
FAILURE WAS A GIVEN.
UNLESS IT HAS TO DO WITH MEDICINE, I'M WORSE THAN MOST FOLKS AT MEMORIZING THINGS.

...MY ACTUAL DUTIES WERE NO DIFFERENT FROM WHEN I SERVED AS A MAID IN THE INNER COURT.
SPLOSH たぷん
...THOUGH I WAS TO BE WORKING IN THE OUTER COURT...

I BET HE HAS THEM REPAINTED EVERY YEAR...
WIPE ふきふき
...BUT THEY'RE SURPRISINGLY DIRTY FOR ALL THEIR BEAUTY.
ふきふき WIPE


THE CORRIDORS OF JINSHI'S OFFICE ARE MORE MODEST THAN THOSE FOUND IN THE INNER COURT...
...BUT THE VERMILION LACQUER ON THE WALLS IS A VIVID RED.

7

WELL, IT'S NOT A COURT LADY'S JOB TO PLAY MAID.
GIVEN THE SIZE OF THESE WALLS, THERE ARE BOUND TO BE SOME HARD-TO-REACH SPOTS.
PERHAPS A FEW CORNERS WERE CUT?
RUB
RUB
...BUT LETTING IT GET TO THIS STATE OF FILTH SHOULDN'T BE AN OPTION EITHER.
CLEANING ISN'T THEIR RESPONSIBILITY, SO I GET WHY THEY MIGHT NOT WANT TO GO OUT OF THEIR WAY TO DO IT...
IN OTHER WORDS, I'M CURRENTLY JINSHI'S PERSONAL MAID.
SINCE THEN, CHORES HAVE BEEN UNDERTAKEN BY SERVANTS HIRED BY THE INDIVIDUALS WHO REQUIRE THEM.
THE PRACTICE OF USING SLAVE LABOR AROUND THE PALACE CAME TO AN END DURING THE REIGN OF THE PREVIOUS EMPEROR.
...A COMPLETELY DIFFERENT BREED FROM THE MISHMASH OF WOMEN SERVING IN THE INNER COURT.
THE LADIES OF THE OUTER COURT ARE MORE LIKE SECRETARIES...
THEY HAVE THE QUALIFICATIONS, COME FROM GOOD FAMILIES, AND ARE WELL-EDUCATED. THEY ALSO HAVE THE PRIDE TO GO WITH THAT.

ぽよん
SMOOSH
GUESS I'LL TACKLE IT NEXT.
きゅっ
SQUEEZE
MY NEW MASTER IS A VERY BUSY MAN. HE HARDLY EVER MAKES IT BACK TO HIS OFFICE.
THANKS TO THAT, CLEANING IT IS EASY...
ぽよ…
BOUNCE
...BUT THERE IS ONE PROB-LEM.
AND WHO EXACTLY DO YOU THINK YOU ARE?!
BOING ぽよ
BOING ぽよ

THE HIGHER QUALITY THE FEED, THE BIGGER THEY GROW, HMM?
BOING ぽよ…
ぽよん BOING
ぽよん BOING
ERM, SO LET ME MAKE SURE I HAVE THIS RIGHT.
YELL ALL YOU WANT, BUT THE SIMPLE FACT IS THAT HE HIRED ME.
HOW IS IT THAT SOMEONE LIKE YOU CAME TO BE WORKING DIRECTLY FOR THE REFINED SIR JINSHI?!
SURMISH
WELL?! I ASKED YOU A QUES-TION!
SHRIEK
...JEALOUS OF ME?
YOU'RE ALL...

BLUSH
カアア
SLAP
トレ
TROMP
にじり
TROMP
にじり
AND I CAN'T SHAKE THE FEELING THEY'RE SLOWLY DRIVING ME INTO A SECLUDED CORNER...
I KNOW I'M NOT THE BEST AT CHOOSING MY WORDS ...
...BUT IT SEEMS THAT WAS VERY MUCH THE WRONG THING TO SAY.
STIIING
キーン
JOLT
ビクッ
EXCUSE ME?!
SURELY YOU DON'T THINK HE'S TREATING ME SPECIAL OR SOME-THING?
BUMP
I'D REALLY LIKE TO AVOID MEETING MY END AT THE HANDS OF THESE FIVE, IF POS-SIBLE.

THE MERE THOUGHT OF IT IS RIDICULOUS.
A MAN WHO IS PRACTICALLY A HEAVENLY MAIDEN HIMSELF ...
...WOULD NEVER TAKE AN INTEREST IN AN UGLY GIRL LIKE ME.
WHEN HIS TABLE IS LADEN WITH THE FINE FLESH OF ABALONE AND BOAR LIKE YOURSELVES...
...WHAT MAN WOULD CHOOSE TO FEAST ON THESE CHICKEN BONES?
O-OF COURSE NOT!
NOT IN THE LEAST !!
OR— AND THIS DOES BOGGLE THE MIND—
PERHAPS YOU SUSPECT THAT HE, OF ALL PEOPLE, IS GIVEN TO PECULIAR TASTES?
PECULIAR TASTES ...

WHOA ...
SHE COULD USE SOME MORE MAKEUP.
SWSH
...WHY DID HE TAKE YOU ON?
THEN ...
COME TO THINK OF IT, THIS LADY ALONE...
...HAS REMAINED CALM THIS ENTIRE TIME.
IT'S TOO BAD. SHE HAS THE MAKINGS OF A BEAUTY WHO'D THRIVE AT THE INNER COURT.
...IF THAT'S AS FAR AS I CAN GET WITH PRETTY WORDS...
...WELL ...

13

HERE'S WHY.
SSK
SHWP
EEK!
SHRP
NOW DO YOU UNDER-STAND?

MY ARM'S A MESS FROM MY RECENT EXPERIMENTS FOR A BURN TREATMENT.
SIR JINSHI'S HEART IS AS HEAVENLY AS HIS FACE.
TREMBLE
HE WAS GRACIOUS ENOUGH TO ALLOW A WRETCH LIKE ME THE CHANCE TO EARN HER KEEP.
TREMBLE
...COME ALONG, GIRLS.
SNIFF
SNIFF SNIFF

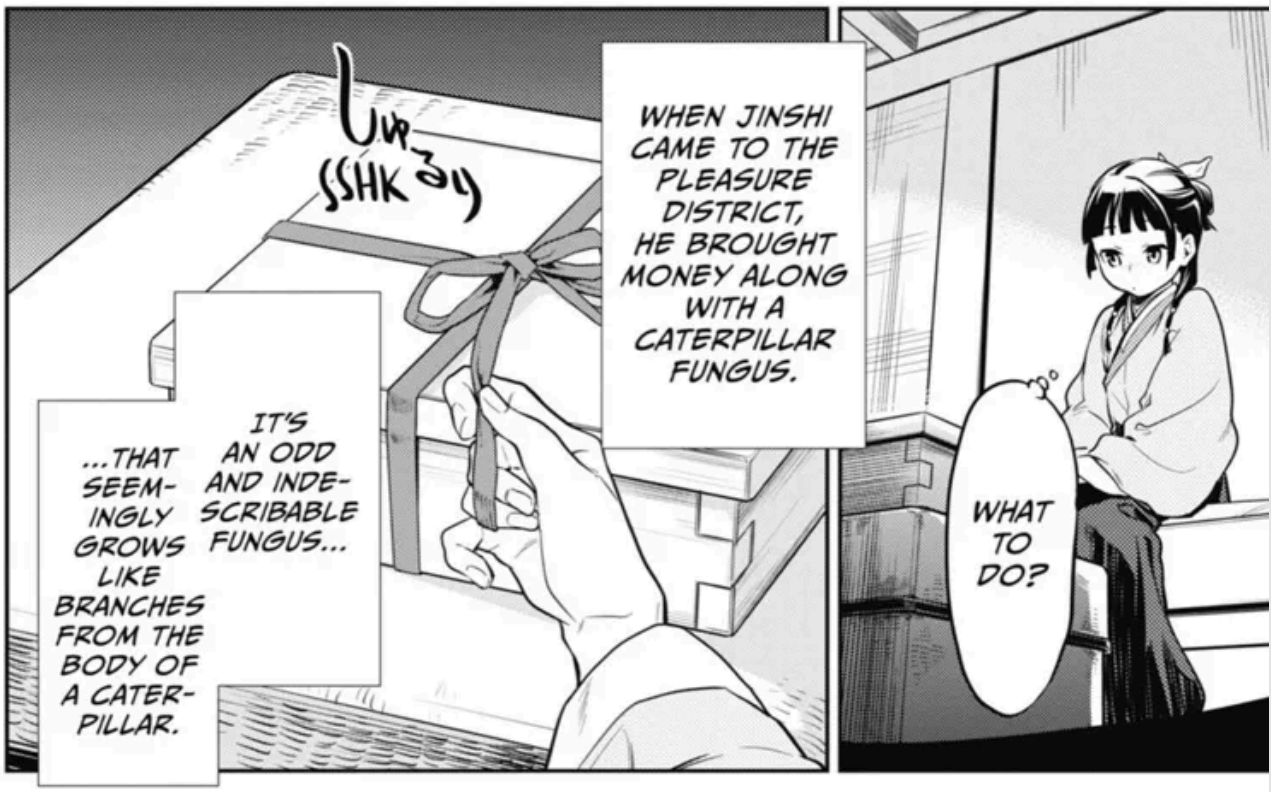
OH?
GLAD THAT'S FINALLY OVER WITH.
ARE YOU OFTEN AT THE RECEIVING END OF SUCH BULLYING?
WHY ARE YOU STANDING AGAINST THE WALL LIKE THAT, SIR JINSHI?
IT'S NOTHING TO WORRY ABOUT. THEY'RE NOT AS BAD AS THOSE AT THE INNER COURT.
AND YOU? WHY ARE YOU RAISING YOUR ARM?
AH, NO REASON.
...AS YOU WISH.
NOW THAT YOU'VE RETURNED, I SHALL FIND ANOTHER SPOT TO CLEAN. PLEASE EXCUSE ME.

SCURRY SCURRY
I DON'T REALLY THINK THERE WAS ANYTHING WRONG IN WHAT I SAID...
...*PE-CULIAR INTER-ESTS," HM?
MUMBLE

THERE WE GO.
PICKINGS SURE ARE SLIM IN THE WINTER.
HANG つるし
つるし HANG
WIPE ふき
WIPE ふき

17

...BUT THE VARIETY IS SORELY LACKING IF I'M TO COOK UP ANYTHING USEFUL.
HMMMMMM...
I'VE BEEN GATHERING MEDICINAL HERBS AROUND WORK...


WHEN JINSHI CAME TO THE PLEASURE DISTRICT, HE BROUGHT MONEY ALONG WITH A CATERPILLAR FUNGUS.
IT'S AN ODD AND INDESCRIBABLE FUNGUS...
...THAT SEEMINGLY GROWS LIKE BRANCHES FROM THE BODY OF A CATERPILLAR.
WHAT TO DO?

はっ
PWOP
...BUT THINKING BACK ON IT NOW, I MIGHT'VE BEEN A BIT TOO HASTY.
ONE LOOK AT IT, AND I GAVE IN TO TEMPTATION, SIGNING THE CONTRACT WITHOUT ANOTHER THOUGHT ...

I WAS JUST TOLD OFF THE OTHER DAY FOR MAKING STRANGE SOUNDS IN THE MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT.
AGH!
NO, NO. REIN IT IN, MAO-MAO.
OOH HOO!
GLOOOW
...OOH HEE HEE!
HEE HEE!
MWEH HEH!
MWEH!
CHIRP
CHIRP
YAAA
AWN
MORE, PLEASE, SUIREN.

NOW I UNDERSTAND WHY GAO SHUN AND THIS ELDERLY MAIDSERVANT ARE THE ONLY ONES ALLOWED IN THIS ROOM.
THANK YOU...
HERE YOU ARE.
SO EVEN AT BREAKFAST, THE GREAT JINSHI HERE WASTEFULLY OOZES SEX APPEAL.
FWOOSH
ぽやあ
RIGHT AWAY.
HE'S LIKE A BUG IN HEAT.
IN SOME SPECIES OF INSECTS, THE FEMALES EMIT A SMELL THAT ATTRACTS THE MALES TO THEM.
ほけ
DAAAZED
HIS ASSETS ARE TRULY SINFUL.
HFF!
HFF!
AND ANY OTHER MAN WOULD PROBABLY JUMP ATOP HIM, SEX BE DAMNED.
SWOON
くらっ
ANY OTHER WOMAN WOULD BE UTTERLY BESIDE HERSELF WITH DESIRE.
HEY ...
PERHAPS I COULD FILL MY POCKETS BY COLLECTING THIS EUNUCH'S SCENT AND TURNING IT INTO PERFUME ...?

I BELIEVE THAT WHAT I'VE BEEN GIVEN IS MORE THAN ADEQUATE FOR A MAID LIKE ME...
?
ARE YOU FINDING YOUR CURRENT LIVING QUARTERS TO BE CRAMPED ...?
I WAS SPOILED FOR INGREDIENTS AND COULD MIX MEDICINES RIGHT AWAY, SO MY COLLECTION OF HERBS WASN'T OVERTAKING MY ROOM AS IT IS NOW.
WHEN I LIVED AT THE JADE PALACE, I COULD USE THE KITCHENS WITH PERMISSION.
IF IT WAS UP TO ME, I'D MOVE INTO QUARTERS WITH A HEARTH AND AN ADJOINING WELL.
BUT TO BE HONEST, IT IS QUITE SMALL.
WARMING
...I WONDER IF HE MEANS HE'LL GIVE ME A MUCH BETTER PLACE.
MUNU
ARE YOU SURE?
JUST SAY THE WORD, AND I CAN HAVE DIFFERENT QUARTERS PREPARED FOR YOU.
21

?
I CAN'T FIGURE OUT WHAT YOU'RE TRYING TO SAY UNLESS YOU ACTUALLY TELL ME.
THOUGH I PROBABLY SHOULDN'T BE TALKING...
WARNING
WARNING
NEEEEIGH
SHAKE
SHAKE
...HOW ABOUT A STABLE THAT'S NEAR A WELL?
...THEN...
IF I LIVED IN A STABLE, I COULD COOK THINGS UP IN PEACE WITHOUT ANYONE BOTHERING ME.
YES, A STABLE.
A STABLE...?
22

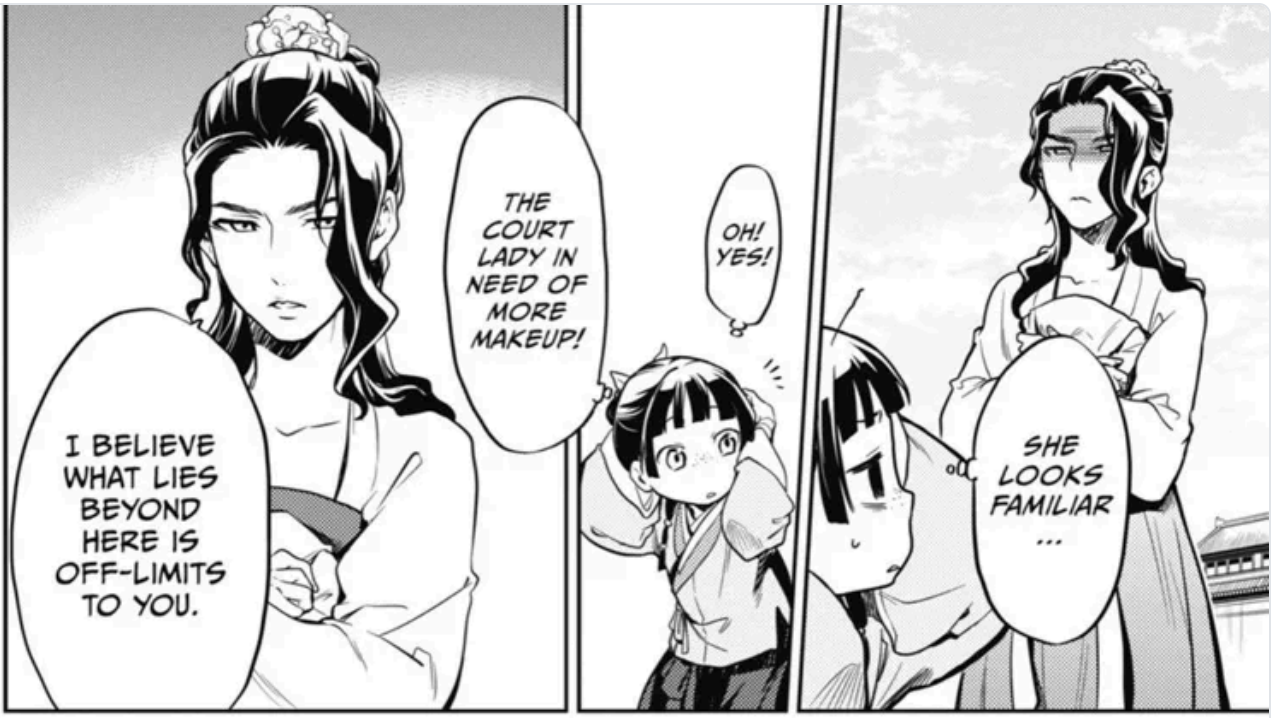
STABLES ARE A NO.
YEAH, WELL... NO SURPRISE THERE.
DEPRESSED しょーーーん
VERY WELL, SIR.
SUIREN, ONE OF JINSHI'S FEW MAIDS, IS IN HER FIFTIES ...
...BUT UNTIL NOW, SHE'S MANAGED THE WHOLE OF THIS IMMENSE RESIDENCE ALL BY HERSELF.
THERE WE ARE!
ONCE WE'RE DONE WITH THE DISHES, WE'LL SCRUB THE FLOORS.
YOU REALLY DON'T HAVE TO!!
YOU CAN LEAVE THEM TO ME—
SUIREN
BUT THEN WE'LL NEVER GET THROUGH THIS AFTERNOON'S WORK!
HOH HOH HOH!
SHE DOESN'T MINCE WORDS, SHE'S QUICK AT HER JOB, AND HER HANDS NEVER STOP MOVING.
GLEAM

I DO THINK, THOUGH, THAT IT WILL BE DIFFERENT WITH YOU, XIAOMAO.
THINGS HAPPEN, AND THEY NEVER SEEM TO STAY ON FOR LONG.
WE'VE HAD MAIDS COME AND GO.
BUT I AM TRULY GLAD TO HAVE YOU HERE.
IT'S QUITE HARD TO MANAGE A RESIDENCE OF THIS SIZE AT MY AGE, AS I'M SURE YOU CAN IMAGINE.
HOWEVER, I KINDA DOUBT IT WAS MONEY THEY WERE AFTER.
OHHH... ARE YOU REFER-RING TO THEFT?
URK!
...BUT FINDING UNDERTHINGS IN YOUR DRESSER THAT YOU DON'T RECOGNIZE WOULD REPULSE JUST ABOUT ANYONE.
WHOA...
THE YOUNG MASTER MIGHT BE USED TO ATTEN-TION...
ON OCCASION, CERTAIN THINGS WOULD EVEN SUDDENLY APPEAR.
SHUDDER SHUDDER
ぞわ
ぞわ
HSSS!
ALL THE MORE SO IF THEY'RE WOVEN OUT OF HUMAN HAIR...

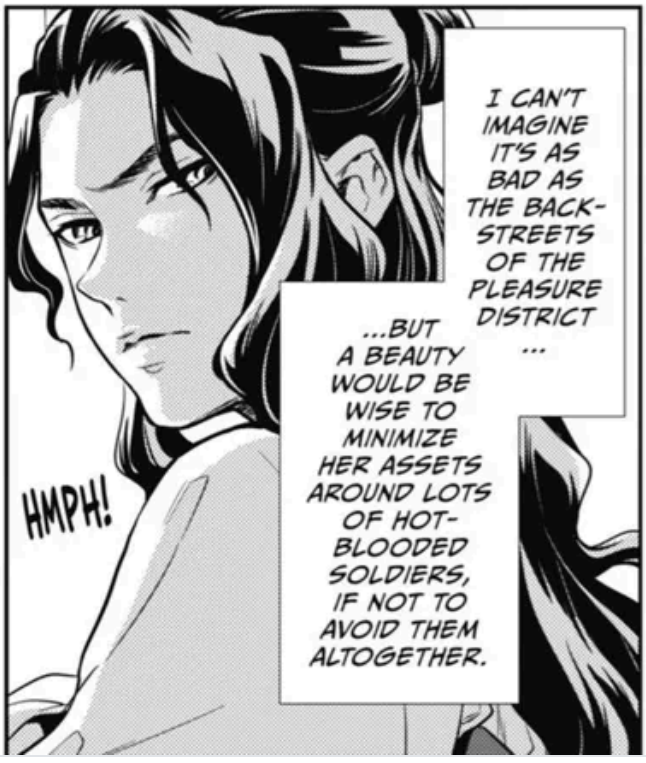
IN-DEED.
WIPE
ふき
WIPE
ふき
MAYBE HE SHOULD JUST WEAR A MASK AT ALL TIMES.
THAT WOULD BE MOST REVOLT-ING.
ALL RIGHT.
NO.
WE HAVE A GUEST TODAY, SO WE'LL TAKE CARE OF IT LATER.
IS THE OFFICE NEXT?
HMM, I'VE JUST ABOUT SEEN ALL OF THE WEST WING NOW.
WHERE SHOULD I GO TODAY?
WE CAN'T OFFEND ARISTOCRATIC SENSIBILITIES BY DUSTING AND POLISH-ING OUT IN THE OPEN, AFTER ALL.
THE OFFICE IS A SIMPLE ROOM AND EASY TO CLEAN.
BUT THE MINUTE A GUEST ARRIVES, I'VE GOT TIME ON MY HANDS.
AND SO, I USUALLY GO FOR A STROLL THROUGH THE OUTER COURT IN MY FREE TIME.

I'D LIKE TO CHECK OUT THE EAST WING, BUT THAT'S WHERE THE SOLDIERS ARE.
IF I'M SPOTTED QUIETLY HARVESTING HERBS ON MILITARY GROUNDS...
...I'M BOUND TO BE MISTAKEN FOR A SPY AND HAULED INTO CUSTODY.
GAO SHUN STERNLY WARNED ME OFF GOING THERE TOO.
ARGH...
BESIDES, SPEAKING OF MILI-TARY...
...THAT'S WHERE HE WHOSE NAME I DARE NOT UTTER WOULD BE...
UMM, WELL ...
HMMM...
PACE
PACE
BUT SINCE I HAVEN'T BEEN THERE YET, I CAN'T SAY FOR CERTAIN THAT THERE ARE NO RARE PLANTS GROWING THERE!
RAISE
26

WHAT THE —?!
OW!!
BONK
WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?


I BELIEVE WHAT LIES BEYOND HERE IS OFF-LIMITS TO YOU.
THE COURT LADY IN NEED OF MORE MAKEUP!
OH! YES!
SHE LOOKS FAMILIAR ...

STARE じぃ
I... I'LL BE MORE CARE-FUL.
SHE'S NOT WRONG, BUT I WISH SHE'D SAID THAT BEFORE SHE HIT ME.


HMPH!
I CAN'T IMAGINE IT'S AS BAD AS THE BACK-STREETS OF THE PLEASURE DISTRICT ...
...BUT A BEAUTY WOULD BE WISE TO MINIMIZE HER ASSETS AROUND LOTS OF HOT-BLOODED SOLDIERS, IF NOT TO AVOID THEM ALTOGETHER.

GLANCE ちら
SINCE SHE CAME FROM THE DIRECTION OF THE EAST WING, DOES THAT MEAN SHE'S A MILITARY OFFICER'S ATTENDANT ...?
IF THAT'S THE CASE, THE PLAIN FACE MAKES SENSE.

NOW IF YOU'LL EXCUSE ME...
CLUCK
FWSH
SNIFF
WHAT COULD IT BE?
I SMELL SANDALWOOD AND SOMETHING WITH A UNIQUE BITTERNESS.
29

DONG
DONG
...THE EAST WING, HMM ...?
SHP
GUESS I'LL HEAD BACK FOR TODAY.
THE NOON BELL ...
AWW, I HOPE I'LL FIND MY MASTER AWAY WHEN I RETURN.